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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/26/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC PHUM ZI

SUBJECT: MUGABE-TSVANGIRAI MEET PRIVATELY

REF: HARARE 48

Classified By: Ambassador James D. McGee for reason 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe and MDC-T president Morgan Tsvangirai met privately last week as Tsvangirai attempted to salvage a deal by gaining concessions from Mugabe on outstanding issues. Mugabe refused to budge and ZANU-PF and MDC remain deadlocked. It is unlikely the SADC Summit today in Pretoria will produce results. The MDC will pursue a solution at the AU Summit in Addis Ababa but is not hopeful. It is likely ZANU-PF will soon form a government without the MDC either before or after the AU Summit. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe held a one-on-one meeting with MDC-T president Morgan Tsvangirai on January 22. MDC secretary-general Tendai Biti told polecon chief that Tsvangirai requested the meeting to satisfy himself that he had exhausted all reasonable options to form a government of national unity. Biti, who is against joining ZANU-PF in a government under any circumstances, said Tsvangirai would have grabbed at any crumbs thrown by Mugabe, and would have tried to convince MDC officials to finalize a deal. Mugabe and ZANU-PF were stupid, according to Biti, in not offering any compromises. The result was that the standoff remains.

¶3. (C) Biti opined that Tsvangirai, a number of his advisors, and a good percentage of the MDC Executive were in favor of joining government if ZANU-PF made some concessions. Nevertheless, the National Council, which would ultimately have to approve an agreement, was solidly against joining ZANU-PF under any circumstances. He believed this was the general sentiment of the MDC rank and file who blame Zimbabwe's economic miseries on Mugabe and his party.

¶4. (C) Biti saw no hope that the SADC Extraordinary Summit taking place today in Pretoria would resolve the deadlock.

He said the MDC had dispatched emissaries to various African countries in advance of the AU summit in Addis Ababa. The MDC would make a push to have the AU take over from SADC and oversee an intensive mediation process, but again he was not hopeful.

¶ 15. (C) Mugabe's spokesman George Charamba, writing his weekly column under the pen name Nathaniel Manheru in The Herald on January 24, publicly revealed the Mugabe-Tsvangirai meeting for the first time. He said that Tsvangirai had pleaded that MDC hardliners were obstructing a deal and asked Mugabe for concessions that he could sell to his party. Mugabe, according to Charamba, refused to offer concessions, stating he had similar difficulties with hardliners.

¶ 16. (C) The Herald went into full spin mode in today's edition in attacking Tsvangirai. It claimed Tsvangirai had sought the meeting after realizing he had "blundered" by rejecting the SADC proposal (essentially the ZANU-PF proposal) to form a government earlier in the week during the SADC mediation (Reftel). The Herald went on to claim that former A/S Jendayi Frazer late last year told South Africa's foreign minister Dlamini-Zuma that the U.S. would not allow Tsvangirai to join the government because he was "too weak" to deal with Mugabe.

COMMENT

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¶ 17. (C) It appears that Tsvangirai and some close advisors would like to join the government if ZANU-PF would make some concessions on the outstanding issues (Reftel). It is doubtful ZANU-PF will give any ground. Even if it did, the MDC National Council has been clear that absent satisfaction of outstanding issues, the MDC will not agree to form a government with ZANU-PF.

¶ 18. (C) We agree with Biti that the SADC Extraordinary Summit today in Pretoria is unlikely to produce results. A ZANU-PF negotiator publicly said last week that if the Summit fails, he expected SADC to support the unilateral formation of a government by Mugabe. Absent some unexpected turns in negotiations, it is likely ZANU-PF will soon form a government, either before or immediately after the AU Summit.
END COMMENT.

MCGEE